

Meeting Minutes

DNR ELK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

October 30, 2014

Ho-Chunk Executive Board Room, Black River Falls

Introductions: Kevin Wallenfang, committee chair, provided introductions. Membership in attendance included: Wisconsin Conservation Congress, DNR Area Supervisors for the northern and westcentral district, DNR Ungulate Researcher, DNR Conservation Warden, DNR Elk Biologists, Ho-Chunk Nation, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, DNR Communications Specialist, US Forest Service and Jackson County Forestry and Parks. Additional members not in attendance were from the Wisconsin Bow Hunters Association, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, DNR Forester, UW-Stevens Point, and Hunters Rights Coalition. The Section Chief of the DNR Wildlife Health Program, the DNR State Veterinarian, the Section Chief of the DNR Big Game Program, the DNR Regional Supervisor for the northern district, and a current member of the elk management program were also in attendance as invited guests.

Kentucky Visit - Logistics Planning Overview: A group that included project coordinators and the volunteer project engineer traveled to Kentucky and spent time with Kentucky staff to plan for all logistics associated with elk trapping and pen repairs. They reviewed what was currently available for trapping efforts and got many questions answered.

- Kentucky has received the agreement from Wisconsin and it is the hope to have a signed agreement by mid-November.

GLIFWC Update:

- On October 2nd an elk update was provided to the Voigt Intertribal Task Force. The Tribes discussed possible ways that they can increase their efforts to help the project be successful.

Trapping Planning in Kentucky: Mike Zeckmeister provided an overview of logistics involved in staffing and planning for the elk trapping efforts in Kentucky. Mike has been put on temporary assignment to serve as Trapping Coordinator to oversee the Kentucky trapping effort. He is working part time on planning efforts now, and after January 1st will serve in that capacity until trapping is complete. He is coordinating all staffing selections and training, transportation and lodging, vehicle needs, and all other details of this effort. Each staff member selected to participate will be required to attend training in December.

Health Team Update: Tami Ryan provided an update on health considerations for Kentucky elk.

- The framework has been laid for a successful quarantine period in Kentucky to ensure that healthy animals are going to get translocated.
- Once the quarantine period begins, the elk are under Wisconsin's supervision for testing requirements. Elk will be processed in Kentucky and held for a minimum of 45 days after which time we expect that they can be transferred to Wisconsin's holding facility for the duration of the quarantine period as required by DATCP. It has not yet been decided if the total quarantine period will be 90 or 120 days

Distribution of Elk to locations in Wisconsin: Due to the requirements of health testing of elk once they are in Wisconsin we are building one holding facility in Jackson County where all health testing will be conducted in 2015.

The committee discussed the initial intentions to then move 20 elk from Jackson County to the Clam Lake and Winter acclimation pens. However, there has been great concern about the length of the quarantine period and what it means to the overall health of the elk. With 120 days in quarantine, elk would not be ready to move until about June 1st. Even a 90 day quarantine is not desirable for moving elk considering that cows will be very close to calving, and the concern about holding animals in acclimation pens so far beyond green-up.

- The idea was posed to release all Kentucky elk in Jackson County in 2015 and potentially re-trapping 20 during the fall/winter of 2014/2015 to move to Clam Lake/Winter. Given the health testing standards that may be required, this may be an option that the committee should consider.
- Given the stressful conditions that elk will be put through if they were brought to Jackson County for a period, then a number were moved up to Clam Lake soon after, they would be heavily stressed and put at risk for additional health concerns

The committee recommends releasing all elk captured in 2015 in Jackson County

The committee further recommends that a second holding facility be built at the USFS Summer Camp site near Clam Lake, and that all elk translocated from Kentucky in 2016 be delivered and released in the Clam Lake/Winter area.

- **GLIFWC:** The Tribes can expect to be upset with this decision, but for the benefit of the elk it would be the best solution. However, we must make a firm commitment to the future of the Clam Lake herd.
- **Forest Service:** Health wise it makes the most sense to release them all in Jackson County. From a social standpoint, the caveat is it's going to raise a lot of questions. However, this provides more time to plan.
- **Ho-Chunk:** Having elk mortalities will not gain support for the project. However, if we attempt to proceed with the idea of letting them all on the landscape here and then transferring them up north later, trapping elk in Jackson County may be difficult.
- **Jackson County Forestry and Parks:** The health of the animals is the most critical component of this equation. It makes sense to keep them here for a time and then possibly move some later to reduce stress. Looking at it from the public perspective, it's going to be easier to explain why the choice was made to keep the animals in Jackson County for a period.
- **Conservation Congress:** It won't be much of a problem for the people of Jackson County. They've wanted elk for so long, they would be more inclined to think negatively of a decision that would be made that would be harmful to the health of the animals.
- **Clam Lake Elk Biologist:** The locals are going to be unhappy with not getting elk this year. However, it's understandable we don't make an attempt to move elk to Clam Lake this year if it's going to put a strain on their health.

- The idea was also raised by the committee to consider building another holding pen up in Clam Lake rather than just having one down in Jackson County. This idea will be advanced; however, funding for this project may be an issue that needs to be explored.

Assisted Dispersal Efforts 2014/2015:

The committee recommends conducting assisted dispersal efforts in the Winter area during the winter of 2014/2015.

- Since it is now unlikely there will be a new batch of elk in to Clam Lake it important to continue with assisted dispersal efforts from the Clam Lake herd to the Winter area.
- There are good opportunities to pursue them next winter including animals from the Butternut area that are causing crop damage, and suitable sex and age animals from the main Clam Lake herd
- Trapping will commence during the first two weeks of January and in February.
- The first priority is trapping in Butternut with other areas supplementing the group.

Update on Jackson County Holding Pen: Scott Roepke gave an overview of operations relative to the pen construction in Jackson County. Because this is now a holding/testing facility rather than an acclimation pen, its complexity has grown. Lindsey and Scott are working with a private contractor on design/build. We hope to have construction underway by mid-November.

Update on Meyer Farm/Winter Acclimation Pen: Laine Stowell provided an update, indicating that the pen is almost fully built and will be operational for this winter's assisted dispersal effort.

Update on Clam Lake Acclimation Pen: Based on previous conversations and the recommendation to keep all Kentucky elk in Jackson County during the first year of capture/testing/release, this pen will not be needed during spring of 2015 so the building of this pen has been put on hold. Dan Eklund from USFS indicated that he would explore possible funding sources that would help turn this pen into something similar to that being built in Jackson County that will accommodate health testing of animals in 2016.

Update on Logistics Plan: Kevin provided an update on the many details of logistics planning including a project timeline.

- Timeline:
 - November
 - Expect a signed agreement with Kentucky
 - Logistics planning underway
 - Pen building underway
 - December
 - Logistics planning continues
 - Training of trapping crew
 - Pre-baiting of trapping sites begins
 - Kentucky pen repair trip
 - Caretakers begin

- January
 - Elk trapping in Kentucky begins
 - Wisconsin elk trapping crews on site in Kentucky
- February
 - Elk trapping complete
 - Health processing and quarantine period begin
- March/April
 - Quarantine period in Kentucky complete
 - Elk are transported to Wisconsin
- May/June
 - Elk are released and monitoring begins
- **Elk communication plan:**
 - A communication plan is being developed to anticipate the arrival of elk in Wisconsin.
- **Research/Monitoring planning:**
 - How does the new concentration of elk in to Black River Falls change the research objectives starting out with the monitoring project? That is yet to be determined.

Next meeting date: To be determined. There was consensus that the committee should meet in person or by phone once a final agreement is signed with Kentucky and before trapping begins.